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Analytical Study Of Brahmavihara In Buddhism And Vedanta Philosophy

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ABSTRACT:

The term “*Brahmavihara*” refers to the four Buddhist virtues and the meditative practices associated with them. The term *Brahmavihāra* literally means ‘abiding in Brahma’ or ‘Sublime attitude’ in both Pali and Sanskrit. The Brahmavihara are also known as the four *appamanna*, or “immeasurables,” as the four sublime states. The four *Brahmavihāras* consist of qualities that one cultivates through meditation to develop these virtues. The *Metta Sutta*, quotes Shakyamuni Buddha stating that the practice of the *Brahmavihāras* can lead one to the realm of Brahmas (Pali: *Brahmaloka*). These virtues include three mental states are -1) loving-kindness or benevolence, 2) compassion, 3) sympathetic joy, and, 4) equanimity. These qualities form a powerful antidote to negative mental feelings and are essential for achieving *Buddhahood* or enlightenment. There are four types of brahmavihara. They are:

Metta – Metta is countless and unconditional desire or good wish for the well-being and happiness of others.

Karuna – This is the compassionate desire to relieve the suffering of others to relieve the suffering of others, where the Buddhist sees the suffering of others as their own.

Mudita – It is a joy felt for the happiness of others, where the Buddhist experiences joy in the happiness of others, even if they played no role in creating that joy.

Upekkha – Upekkha is a state of mental balance that remains calm and impartial, particularly during the fluctuations of life. Upekkha, or equanimity, is grounded in deep insight.

Buddhism emphasizes the importance of an equitable society founded on wisdom and compassion. The Buddha’s concept of *Brahma Vihara* is quite logical, and can be applied in our society through our interpersonal relationships, social attitudes, and empathetic approach towards others. Compassion is intertwined with loving-kindness among the four Brahmaviharas. They foster positive lifestyles and serve as remedies for negative emotions like hatred, jealousy, and attachment, guiding individuals towards inner peace and enlightenment.

In Vedanta philosophy, the term Brahmavihara may not be frequently mentioned. These qualities are aligned with fundamental principles such as universal love, compassion, and detachment. It is only upon realizing the oneness of the universe that Vedanta highlights the recognition of the self, Atman, as being identical with

the ultimate reality, Brahman. In this context, compassion, joy, and balance naturally emerge as expressions of a spiritually awakened life. Both traditions have given importance to these qualities as essential for transcending ego-driven concerns that can hinder both individual and collective well-being.

Key Words: Brahmavihara, Compassion (Karuna), Empathy, Ethics, Anatta (non-self), Dukkha (suffering), Anicca (impermanence), Metta (loving-kindness), Mudita (Sympathetic joy), and Upekkha (equanimity)

INTRODUCTION:

The Thought of Brahmavihara in Buddhism:

Buddhism is one of the largest religions in the world. It was originated two thousand five hundred years ago in India. It is an ethical religion in the sense that no god is necessary for it. It merely relies on the teachings given by the Buddha. Buddha truly very altruistically taught moral philosophy.

The term Brahma-vihara certainly comes from the Buddhist perspective. There is not such word in Upanishads. The Upanishads support the idea of Eternal Brahma. 'Brahma-Vihara', being one of the most essential and final psycho-ethical paradigms of a human being's existence, empowers mankind ultra-vast because 'Brahmavihara' or 'Ultimate Reality' is the ultimate aspiration of every being. ¹

The Upanishadic idea of Brahmavihāra is advised as "*Be lost altogether in Brahman, like an arrow that has completely penetrated its target*". ² Therefore, to be self-conscious of being absolutely inaudated by Brahma is not a mere concentration of mind but it ought to be the signification of the entire life, thought, and deed of every human being. Only then should all activity be immersed in the sense of that freedom of all freeing energy within which we play and act. Brahmavihara represents the highest form of self-realization, not to be confused with ego. The lower parts of the self presents the egoistic impulses from which self-realization suspend lower personality by higher itself.

Such development is possible with the formation of a personality which is conscious of the oneness with the infinite Brahman. Regarding the ideal of Brahmavihāra, Tagore states, "This is the ultimate end of man, to find the one which is his soul, the key with which he opens the gate of the spiritual life, the heavenly kingdom". ³

How Brahmavihara is explained in Buddhism:

In Buddhist mythology Brahma is a powerful god. In Buddhism the four Brahmaviharas are related to strength. This practice is the practice of the four Brahmaviharas, or those will strength. To develop them well, we must become strong, even courageous. When developed, the Brahmaviharas become potent forces through which we protect ourselves and others. They are powerful aids in conflict resolution, healing, and the establishment of social harmony. As strengths, they enrich the confidence of not only one's external life but also one's internal one. They lead us to keep love at the forefront in every social interaction whomever we meet and no matter how difficult it is to meet. With loving-kindness, we learn how to keep healthy goodwill toward the hostile, to keep even compassion toward those suffering tragic loss, to feel a jubiliary joy without pressure when rejoicing at others, and to have equanimous love toward those we cannot help.

How Brahmavihara is discussed in Pali Language:

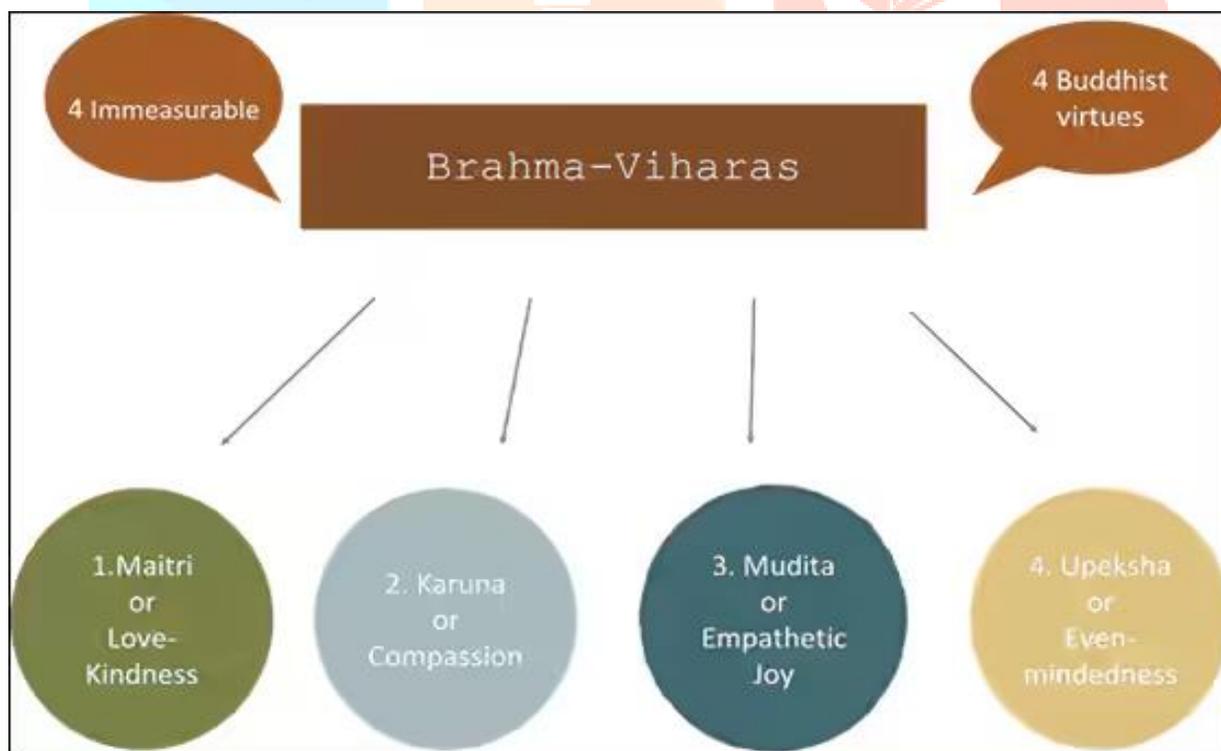
The Brahmavihāras are states of mind that cannot exist along with hatred, and in this they are similar to Brahma – the divine but transient ruler of the higher heavens in the traditional Buddhist model of the world. Brahma is free from hate; and those who constantly and attentively develop these four sublime states, both

by conduct and meditation, are said to become equal to him (brahma-samo). He who becomes under their influence to a certain extent would be reborn in congenial worlds, that is, the realms of Brahma. Therefore, these states of mind are referred to as godlike, Brahma-like.

The Brahmaviharas in our daily life:

The Brahmaviharas grow outside of meditation as we begin to recognize and cultivate them outside our meditation experience. If we have a regular familiarity with what is to love, we can summon any of the Brahmaviharas when we need it. The Brahmaviharas are also a guide for our most appropriate action as we search for the wise and loving thing to do in every situation. The development of the Brahmaviharas in our social life creates profit for us in two ways, that is, in the goodness which it brings inside us and also for all who are its recipients.

The meditation that has the name Brahmavihara bhavana is these: Meditation into sublime states. Meditation into love, compassion, and sympathetic joy would bear the attainment of absorptions one, two, and three; meditation, in turn, on equanimity would bring that of jhana number four. Basically, the final attainment on the Brahmaviharas is in terms of producing a state of mind which can very much be held firm for further use. Similar to meditation, Brahmaviharas grow as we bring awareness of them into our daily lives. For someone who has regular familiarity with that feeling of love, they're likely to be able to conjure up any of the Brahmaviharas when called for it. The Brahmaviharas can also guide us in how we would like to act in each situation, as we try to discover what the wise and loving thing to do would be in that particular case. Developing the Brahmaviharas in our social life has double benefits. Inner goodness increased by them and all those who are on the receiving end of our love.



Buddhism teaches us to practice three meritorious deeds: Generosity (Dāna), Morality (Sīla) and Meditation (Bhāvanā) to eradicate suffering and to achieve more exalted happiness. The first meritorious deed will help us to walk on the path to purification: practice of giving (Dāna). It is like ornaments that beautify one's mind with happy feelings.

In the Buddhist system the Brahmavihāra along with higher meditation tends to Nibbāna (Nirvāna) as ultimate goal; but if they are not developed to that height. It seems like the immediate result is the attainment of the Brahma world. Brahma is free from hate, anger, jealousy, harbour and resentment (averāand abyapajjā, etc). In the Donabrahma Sutta of the Aṅguttaranikāya, the Buddha said that one who constantly develops these four sublime states, by conduct and meditation he is said to become equal to Brahma, (Brahma-samo).⁴

The four Brahmavihara apply only to the human and the relational level. Those are mainly forms of love and a great readiness to see, welcome, accept, and resonate with others. The name Abiding of Brahmā or Brahmā-like abiding comes from the Vedic deity Brahmā, who has been adopted by Buddhists and given a heavenly place in their cosmology.⁵

All four varieties of Brahmavihāra have the property of enabling us to enter that aspect which is nonseparate in our experience of the world and the other. Hence, whenever we allow ourselves to rest in one of the Four Immesurables, we are operating in a mode of mind and heart that is radically opposed to our habitual experience of self versus–world-and-others.⁶

Brahmavira in Vedanta Philosophy:

Vedānta is primarily a school of Indian philosophy. In reality, it is a branch of knowledge that attempts to give a consistent interpretation of the philosophy of the Upaniṣads. Advaita Vedānta is one version of Vedānta. Advaita is often translated as “non-dualism” though it literally means “non-secondness.” The world has no separate existence apart from Brahman. The experiencing self (jīva) and the transcendental self of the Universe (ātman) are in reality identical (both are Brahman), though the individual self seems different as space within a container seems different from space as such. These cardinal doctrines are represented in the anonymous verse “brahma satyam jagan mithya; jīvo brahmaiva na parah” (Brahman is alone True, and this world of plurality is an error; the individual self is not different from Brahman). Plurality is experienced because of error in judgments (mithya) and ignorance (avidya). Knowledge of Brahman removes these errors and causes liberation from the cycle of transmigration and worldly bondage.⁷

Above all, Brahman underpins all objects and experiences in classical Advaita Vedanta. He is pure in existence, consciousness, and bliss are three aspects of Brahman. Every existence necessity has been preceded by a knowing self. Manifestation into His divinity to take form is what life is supposed to teach.

Indian spirituality is deeply rooted in the ancient philosophical and religious traditions of the land. Philosophy emerged in India as an enquiry of the mystery of life and existence. Indian sages, who are called Rishis or ‘seers’, developed special techniques known collectively as Yoga, which helps transcend both the senses and the ordinary mind. Through these techniques, they gain access to the internal state of consciousness and study it further for revealing important truths about the true nature of man and the universe.

The sages discovered that man’s true nature does not lie in the body or the mind. These are always changing and perishable, but the spirit is unchanging, immortal, pure consciousness. They called it, therefore, the Atman. The Atman is the real Self of man, the knowing in truth, the source in fact of man’s knowledge, happiness and power. All individual selves, said the Rishis, are parts of infinite Consciousness which they call Brahman. Brahman is the ultimate Reality, the ultimate cause of the universe. Ignorance of man’s true nature is the primary cause of human suffering and bondage and can attain to a state immortal and ever peaceful and fulfilling, called Mukti. Religion in ancient India was a way of life, the living which counted man as the realizer of his true nature and the attainer of Mukti.

Thus philosophy offered the right view of Reality, while religion told the right way of life. So philosophy could provide the vision, while religion affected fulfillment: philosophy was the theory, and religion was the practice. Thus in ancient India, philosophy and religion complemented each other. In fact, they together constituted a single endeavour, an integral discipline. This integral religious philosophy or philosophical religion is known as Vedanta.

Comparison of Vedanta's Moksha (Liberation) to the Buddhists' concept of Nibbana and how it connects with a compensate ethical life:

Concept of Moksha in Hinduism:

In every religion, the idea of moksha, nirvana or liberation is very extremely emphasized. In Hinduism, the present life is described as being dependent upon several past lives due to different desires and karmas and hence the effects of those karmas. Now, there is a wheel of desire, karma, and reaction that drives people through this life. Consequently, every being has to remain in this world to enjoy the consequences of their desires and actions (karmas). This is known as a rebirth process in samsara (in Sanskrit) or rotation through innumerable lifetimes. The final outcome of all efforts is to break this endless cycle of rebirth, which is known as escapism from samsara. By yoga, a break is made from this cycle, and the process of liberation or freedom from chakras of rebirth which is termed as 'moksha'.

After moksha, our soul continues evolving in the inner worlds until finally merging back into its origin, which is God, the Primal Soul. Moksha, nirvana and mukti (liberation) are thus all terms that refer to the same thing in Hinduism, release or freedom from the cycles of birth and death (samsara). Hence, Moksha is neither a situation nor an attainment, but a process. According to Hindus, moksha is not experienced or realized but achieved through the process of God-realization. The liberated soul or atman finally enters into the abode of God – the kingdom of God. The ultimate goal of every life, for all human beings, is to reach the stage of moksha or mukti (salvation). Every Hindu desires to attain moksha since it is the end of the cycle of death and rebirth.

In the Vedas, the mere outline of the idea of Moksha is present. Heaven, that place in which the pleasures enjoyed would not end, would be the maximum happiness of life. It is in the Upanisads that we first get an idea about Moksha. Sometimes within these two Upanisads, Moksha is defined somewhat as the identity of the self with the Brahman, the ultimate reality, and sometimes as likeness of the self with God. ⁸

Concept of Moksha in Buddhism:

In Buddhism, Moksha is viewed as the negative ultimate destiny. Liberation in Buddhism is Nirvana which literally means 'cooling down' or 'blowing out'. Those who believe have a positive achievement in stating that it is only when the fire of passions cools down that a state of perfect peace and civility will be attained. Not only that, some, however, may believe that Nirvana also brings some positive bliss - "*Nibbanam paramam sukham*", says the Dhammapada. This happiness is incomparable and beyond description. ⁹

The primary cause of suffering is ignorance (avijja), says the Lord Buddha. It is cutting avijja by the sword of wisdom that actually enables a person to achieve Nirvana. The Buddha said— "When you have learned this, to be freed from the bond of existence you must cut down ignorance with all your efforts, for it is the root of pain. Then, set free from the bonds of the prison-house of existence, you will possess as Arhats natures perfectly pure. You shall attain Nirvana." ¹⁰

Rejection of Moksha in Charvaka School:

The charvakas, or Lokayatans, totally rejects any concept of enlightenment or moksha. Once, after death nothing remains of a being. It is futile to talk of mukti or liberation. It is not only useless, but it is totally a wrong way of living the only life a being enjoys. Matter can think. There is no other world. Death is the end of all.|| ¹¹ The major religions dream of defying the life of man, in individual and race. It is the moksha of the Hindus, the nirvana of the Buddhists, the kingdom of heaven of the Christians.

Moksha is a spiritual realization. It is self-liberation, the fulfilment of the human spirit up to the heart of the eternity. This is the ultimate fulfillment satisfying everything else is action directed towards the appreciation of this end. Hence moksha can be reached by yoga, because any one of the four yogas or disciplines, the karma, jnana, raja and the bhakti yoga, can enable us to attain moksha. Non-duality (non-separation of individual and reality) and personified worship (god as love) are the fundamental principles of Advaita Vedanta and Bhakti traditions respectively.

To get above karma one has to know the self through nirvikalpa Samadhi and attain mukti (freedom) from rebirth. He can also attain moksha by bhakti or love of the manifestations of Shiva, Vishnu or Brahma. A person can attain liberation from worldly grief and be established in a state of high consciousness or supreme bliss. This state of supreme bliss also leads to a state of nirvana, where ego or nama-rupa can be extinguished, revealing one's true identity. It is thus the dissolution of ego by which even the final goal is destroyed. Thus, moksha in Buddhism and Hinduism is not only a concept or belief but a way of life.

Moksha in Advaita Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism is essentially the same. Other schools of Hinduism may have slightly different nuances for the concept of moksha, but it always means liberation from rebirth. Nirvana in Theravedic (Hinayan) Buddhism schools can define something else, but always means liberation from rebirth. Nirvana as it appears in the Theravedic (Hinayana) Buddhism schools is not same as Nirvāna of the Mahayana traditions but all mean liberation from rebirth. It is said that both Moksha and Nirvāna free oneself from the cycle of reincarnations/samsara. In the Buddhist context, nirvana refers to cessation of being born again into new bodies – the flames of becoming and doing, which keep rebirth enlivened:

*“mana eva manushyanam
karanam bandha-mokshayoh
bandhaya visayasango
muktyai nirvisayam manah”*

“For man, mind is the cause of bondage and mind is the cause of liberation. Mind absorbed in sense objects is the cause of bondage, and mind detached from the sense objects is the cause of liberation. As the mind, so the man; bondage or liberation is in our own mind.”

When a man realizes the truth that nothing is ever bound to him, realizes that he has always been liberated. Nirvana is the ultimate goal of Buddhism, and with Nirvana, the bhikkhu attains success. Birth and death have no entry into Nirvana, and there is no descent from there. There is no space for personality. The same is seen/realized/ 'attained' also in Moksha. Indeed, the similarities between Moksha and Nirvana are much bigger than the differences. The former has almost passed all Indian worldviews.

Brahmavihara as a reflection of Ultimate reality in Vedanta:

The existence of Brahman is Absolute in nature which has no acceptable relation to empirical reality. According to the compatibility of the subjective knower, the notion of Brahman is discussed in two respects in Advaita Vedānta School, namely, Parā-Brahman (Supreme Reality) and Aparā-Brahman (Lower Brahman).

Śaṅkara's interpretation of Vedānta Sūtra is known as Advaita Vedānta. The essence of this philosophy can be articulated in half of a verse: "Brahman Satyam, Jaganmithyā, Jivo Brahmaiva nāparaḥ" ¹² which means that Brahman is the reality, there is no distinction between Jīva and Brahman rather, relevant Jīva is nothing but the Brahman.

The Absolute Being as Existence:

According to Advaita Vedānta, Brahman is one without any kind of relation. It does not relate to anything because it has nothing apart from it with which it can be related. Thus, relations cannot be real.

Ramanuja's Dualism:

Rāmānuja (*ācārya*), the eleventh century South Indian philosopher, refers to the thesis or position known as "dharmabhūta nana" somehow in the "Viśiṣṭādvaita" tradition. It means that all epistemic conditions are thus intentional or object-directed, be it consciousness or perception. Thus, if even consciousness needs something external to itself for its existence, then pure consciousness cannot exist apart from difference (with qualities, properties, and objects of consciousness). Hence, if consciousness exists, then difference and plurality must exist too.

a) Intentionality of Consciousness:

This is known as the doctrine of "*dharmabhūtajñāna*" in the Viśiṣṭādvaita tradition. It means that all epistemic states, including consciousness or perception, are either *intentional* or object oriented. If even consciousness requires an object for its existence, then it follows that pure consciousness cannot exist apart from difference (such as qualities, properties and objects of consciousness). Thus, if consciousness exists, it follows that difference and plurality must also exist.

b) Consciousness is a Property of Something:

The other major object-thesis that Ramanuja holds is that consciousness itself is a property. Although this appears trivial to modern readers, it is the very key of Ramanuja's opponents' project that Brahman is a single reality and devoid of all distinctions or qualities. Indeed, Ramanuja's enemies have no problem in affirming regarding Brahman that it is truth (*satyam*) knowledge (*jñānam*) and infinite (*anantam*). These seem to be properties belonging to Brahman, but indeed, the very being of Brahman. Rāmānuja, on the contrary, defends the view that attributions draw attention to the reality of *Brahman's* qualities.

c) Individuals are Real:

Another major thesis that Rāmānuja has fought hard for is the reality of the individual. According to Advaita Vedanta, the individual person, as contrasted to other persons, is an illusion (in Sanskrit, *māyā*) resulting from ignorance (*avidya*). Rāmānuja argues that the very conception that something can be ignorant is premised on the reality there is an individual who could be ignorant. So all the Vedantins affirm that Brahman is of conscious and informative with knowledge.

Brahman and Ātman:

Even with the idea of co-ordinate predication is accepted, there is yet another challenge which Rāmānuja has to face; that of the Upanisadic identity of Brahman (the Ultimate) with *Ātman* (or Self). It would thus seem that if these two be one, it leaves no place for affirming a plurality of individuals. This would, in principle be circumvented by denying that "*Ātman*" means self, but this would be to assigning to the term "*Ātman*" a meaning which it does not bear in Sanskrit or Vedic. According to Rāmānuja, *Brahman* is the Self of all.

According to the Upanisadic texts, Rāmānuja believes that the individual self *jīva*, or *jīvātman* can also be described as being identical with the Ultimate Self or *Ātman* or *Paramātman*. This is according to our natures. To Rāmānuja, each *jīva* really has a common essential nature of being a knower with Brahman. But, because of starting from actions (karma) without beginning, the real property of being knower and dependent on Brahman becomes hidden to us. Therefore, likeness in one aspect to Brahman does not mean that we ourselves are either omnipotent, omniscient or all good.

Bhakti:

In fact, Ramanuja's original dhamma for Indian epistemology or knowing is actually that bhakti, or devotion, is itself an epistemic state. This has been understood: for Ramanuja, from the knowledge of Brahman, it consists of directly perceiving it. When bhakti becomes strongly rooted in an individual, it gets converted into *parabhakti*, the highest order of bhakti. All of them, however, have bhakti as direct awareness of Brahman's nature, and this for him defines its knower, or *jñāna* (*Vedārthasaṅgraha*). Sometimes Ramanuja's synonyms for this state obscure the perceptual character of bhakti. At one point, he calls it meditation or worship (*upāsana*). He, however, insists that it is a kind of seeing, having the character of direct perception (*pratyakṣatā* or *sākṣātkāra*).

Rāmānuja's account of *bhakti* clearly indicates its implicit understanding of one's dependence and helplessness before God (a view shared by both the Northern and Southern schools). As discussed, God is supposed to create fruits of desire in Rāmānuja's thinking. Without him doing anything by creating a world that exists, it could never have happened such that we could seem to be doers when actually isolated persons with so many desires cut off from peers, with incorrect beliefs, and with no way to work through predictions. The creative role of God for this account is bringing about the world in a way one cannot see and therefore did not have to necessarily require a natural system of realities. Here is an image of the human condition; we really are, as individual units, helpless but for the creative dispensation of God.

Contemporary relevance and application of Brahmavihara:

CONCLUSION:

The Upanisadic notion of Brahmavihāra is to "Be lost altogether in Brahman, like an arrow that has completely penetrated its target". To be aware that one is entirely enclosed in Brahma is not just a focusing of mind. The ultimate end of all life, thought, and deed must be aimed at that. The way of Brahmavihāra is the fullest realization of self. The self is not to be confused with the ego. The egoistic impulses form the lower self. The Self-realization is transcending the lower self by the higher self. By cultivating an individuality conscious of the essential oneness with the infinite Brahman, this transcendence can be achieved. For Tagore, with the reference to the ideal of Brahmavihāra, "This is the ultimate end of man, to find the one which is his soul, the key with which he opens the gate of the spiritual life, the heavenly kingdom".¹⁴

In fact, advices are found for control of materialism in Indian ethico-religious theory. Indian philosophical systems, have very rightly claimed that our ignorance regarding true knowledge has given origin to cravings

for materials, which compel the performance of sakāma karmas. The result of karma offer binds the human beings with the chains of suffering. On the other hand, this binds the transmigration of the soul and rebirth. One has to renounce all material and worldly pleasures to get rid of the misery attached to those phases; also perform only niskama karmas, so that one could probably be at whose feet we are nearing the end of Brahmavihāra. This says: State of absolute cessation of misery and pain, as soul is liberated from bhava-chakra and identified with the Brahman. It is a blissful existence settle in Brahman.

The world becomes the perfect gift of joy, the eternal token of love from God to us. But we fail to understand the world because we do not reach out and realize that love. The world has become a battlefield among us to scramble and fight each other for its wealth. Brahmavihāra can never survive, thrive or flourish or truly become actualized in such a world.

Good relationship that man creates between him and others develops the society as the pure wisdom. It would enlighten those concerned with establishing such good relationships, the essential basis for good feeling such as maitrī, karunā, muditā and upekkhā in man. This wisdom brings about self-realization in man who, once realized and identifies himself with nature. Hence, with mutual relation between man and nature, social development can be reconciled with the conservation of nature. There can be only celebration of such a new religion of love, freedom and realization as can bear fruits of love, trust and enjoyment for others and consequently will lead us to Heavenly Abode of Peace that is Brahmavihāra.

The main aim of these Brahmavihāras is to elevate human life. Their fruits may be realized even during life itself. They are not meant only for bhikkus and bhikkunis but for all human beings. The main point of this whole thing is to drive away all evil thoughts from a person's mind. One should possess all four – they can convert a man to a good and enlightened person. If all try to cultivate them irrespective of creed, colour, race, or sex, earth can be transferred into a paradise, where all could live in perfect peace and harmony as ideal citizens of one world. The world is getting more self-centered every day. Thus let's change it and nothing more, not all the pain and negativity, they should practice it daily for much better outcomes in life.

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